

Waukegan News Sun, February 18, 2006

A new agreement with Medicare and Medicaid administrators will save Lake County hospitals \$6 million over the next three years, said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park.

The agreement with the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) allows hospitals in Lake County to be reassigned to higher reimbursement rates used in Chicago.

The settlement reverses last year's CMS decision to move all of Lake County's hospitals into a newly created reimbursement payment rate with Kenosha County, Kirk said.

The change would have lowered the reimbursement rate for Lake County hospitals because they would no longer be counted as part of the higher Chicago wage index. Wisconsin's lower index "would have have led to much reduced payments to Lake County hospitals," Kirk said.

"The move to pay Lake County hospitals with lower rates used in Wisconsin make no sense and would have reduced our hospital payments by over \$6 million," the congressman said.

Because of Lake County's proximity to the Wisconsin border, CMS created the new statistical reimbursement rate that would have drastically lowered the Medicare repayment rates for Lake County.

The change would have hurt Highland Park Hospital the most. Highland Park Hospital was the first hospital to seek help, Kirk said.

Despite being only five miles from the Cook County border, CMS removed Highland Park from the Chicago wage index, he said.

Kirk said he wrote "multiple letters" to the administrator of CMS, Dr. Mark McClellan, arguing the

move "ran counter to their initiatives to reduce barriers to clinical care."

The new rules would have triggered needless and costly complications because Highland Park is part of the Evanston Northwestern Hospital system which includes Evanston and Glenbrook hospitals in Cook County, he said.

"We're pleased by the decision," said Mary O'Brien, president of Highland Park Hospital. "We thank Congressman Kirk for all of his efforts on our behalf," she said.

Bill Ries, president of Lake Forest Hospital, issued a similar statement.